

**THE PRESSURE OF BEING HOMOSEXUALS AS REPRESENTED IN C.
JAY COX'S *LATTER DAYS***

Reetha Priscisla Oyong

S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies
in the English Department, Faculty of Humanities
Diponegoro University

1. Introduction

Latter Days is an American movie which can be considered as a reflection of social reality that happens in the society nowadays. The movie shows one of social realities in this modern era which is called as sexual disorientation. Even though sexual disorientation has probably been a common issue in this era, there are still many people who consider sexual disorientation as taboo.

Many people suffer from sexual disorientation nowadays. It can happen to either men or women in many countries in this world. One type of sexual disorientation is homosexuality. Homosexuality is the condition when sexual desire or behavior is directed toward a person of one's own sex. Many scientists believe that nature and nurture are two main factors in developing the sexual orientation. That is the reason why family has an important role in the self-development of children. However, society has also a great influence in determining the orientation of a person, including the sexual orientation.

An example of homosexuality can be seen in C. Jay Cox's movie *Latter Days*. It is interesting how Christian, a guy who is a homosexual, not only can live his life openly as gay among the society but also tries to get close to Aaron, his new neighbour, who is a mormon missionary from Idaho. When Aaron finally realizes that he has fallen in love with Christian, Aaron is rejected by his father and scolded by his mother. Overwhelmed by despair, Aaron attempts suicide. He is then sent by his parents to a treatment facility to be cured of his homosexuality. Escaping from the treatment facility, Aaron tries to find Christian. However, Aaron's heart is broken when a stranger answers the door in Christian's apartment. After that, Aaron makes his way to Lila's restaurant. Christian, who has worked there before, comes out to serve a plate to customers and see Aaron. Christian is overjoyed to see Aaron, they reconcile and later celebrate Thanksgiving.

The movie exemplifies, a rejection from family and society that gives more pressure to a homosexual person. This essay explores the social rejection experienced by the two main characters, Aaron and Christian, and how it affects their lives. The rejection is part of the pressure of being homosexual as represented in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*.

2. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*, this essay employs the theories of the narrative and cinematic aspects to reveal homosexuality issue in this movie.

2.1. Narrative Aspect

For a movie also contains a story, it must have the narrative aspects as well. This essay, the narrative aspects to discuss are; character, setting, and conflict.

Characters are important in a movie because they are the doers of the actions in the story. Kennedy and Gioia stated: "A character, then, presumably an imagined person who inhabits a story—although that simple definition may admit to a view of exceptions" (1993: 60). Those exceptions occur because in some work of art the main character could be a person or a thing. However, most people are more familiar with human being as the characters of a story. According to Potter, character of a story can be divided into protagonist and antagonist. "The protagonist is always the focal point of the action of the story, the character that the story is almost obviously about. Meanwhile, the antagonist is the main person or thing or force that opposes the protagonist" (Potter, 1967: 7). Both are important for the narrative flow of the story even though the protagonist must always be the main focus.

Setting is usually mentioned as the story's time and place. Morner and Rausch stated: "setting refers to general locale, time in history or social milieu in which the action of literary work takes place" (1991:20). Not only about when or where the story takes place, but setting is also about how the condition around the places. According to Meyer, it consists of governmental regulation, society custom, and religion, moral, intellectual and emotional condition (1990:107). Therefore, setting can also frame the social and religious environment in a story.

Conflict is a literary element that involves a struggle between two opposing forces, usually the protagonist and the antagonist. Perrine maintained:

Conflict is a clash action, desire, ideas, or goals in the plot of a story. Conflict may exist between the main character and the other person or persons (man against man): between the main character and some external force physical nature, society, or fate (man against some destructive element in his own nature (man against himself)). (Laurence Perrine, 1988: 1408).

Therefore, conflict does not only happen between the main character and the other characters. It can also happen to the main character against himself.

In other words, conflict can be divided into internal conflict and external conflict. According to McDougal, internal conflict can also be said as psychological conflict for the conflict occurs when the character experiences two opposite emotions or desires inside himself. External conflict is marked by the character finds himself in struggle with

other characters who have different point of view in facing the problems (2001: 46-48). In conclusion, conflict in a story does not always come from outside the characters, yet it often comes from inside the characters emotionally.

2.2. Cinematic Aspect

Cinematic aspect is definitely important part in analyzing a movie. It is also usually mentioned as cinematography. Spencer once said: "Cinematography is the art of motion picture photography by the recording light" (1973 : 454). Cinematic aspect consists of what appears on the frame. There are several things about camera that must be understood in order to analyze a film. This essay

analyzes Jay Cox's *Latter Days* by analyzing its camera distance and camera angle technique.

Camera distance is often called as shot size. McKenzie stated: "Shot size depends on the distance between the camera and the object. It affects how people perceive a shot" (2003: 4). The different technique of shooting will give the different interpretations to people who watch it. There are several distance in shooting a film. According to McKenzie, there are nine kinds of shot size: extreme long shot, very long shot, long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, middle close-up, close-up, big close-up, and extreme close-up (2003: 5-13). Distance between the camera and the object has a significant influence to the captured object. The farthest shot is extreme long shot, and the closest shot is extreme close-up.

Camera angle is also usually called as shot angle. McKenzie defined camera angle as "the position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows" (2003: 16). Camera angle is about the relationship between camera and the captured object. McKenzie divided camera angle into five kinds of shot: bird's eye view, high angle, eye level, low angle, oblique/ canted angle (2003: 16-23). The difference of every angle depends on the position of the camera when it is capturing the object. It can be from above, below, and right in front of the object.

2.3. Homosexuality in Society

The word "homosexual" was first used by Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1869 and spreaded widely by the German sex researcher, Richard Reiherr Von Kraft-Ebing, in his book *Psychopatia Sexual*. Homosexual refers to sexual attraction

among members of the same-sex. According to American Psychological Association, the male homosexual is called by Gay, where a male has sexual orientation to a male, too. And the female homosexual is called by Lesbian, it is when a female has sexual interest to female (2013).

Homosexuality was originally thought by the American Psychological Association (APA) to be a mental disorder. However, in 1975 APA then released a public statement that homosexuality was not a mental disorder. In 1994, two decades later, the APA finally stated, "... homosexuality is neither a mental illness nor a moral depravity. It is the way a portion of the population expresses human love and sexuality." (Hooker, 1957: 18-31). By the statement released by APA, society feels like getting the answers to their question about homosexuality. It is a scientific and medical understanding that sexual orientation is not a choice, but rather a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors, especially with regard to early uterine environment. That is the reason why the homosexuals have their right to live their life as normal people.

In order to live as a normal people, homosexuals have to pass the process which is called by *coming out*. According to Nevid, *coming out* is a revelation or acknowledgment that one is a gay man, a lesbian, or a bisexual. However, *coming out* is a long, difficult and intimidating thing to be done by the homosexuals (1995: 51-52). Because by *coming out*, a homosexual has a big risk to be rejected by those people around him and even his family.

The existence of homosexuals in society and their interaction or socializing with the environment are always faced with the laws, norms, and

values prevailing in the society. According to Greene, the situation has the potential to produce the variety reaction and treatment of the surrounding people in the environment (2000: 45). There are some people who can act like usual and be able to receive homosexuality, but there are people who underestimate the homosexuals, and there are also an unpleasant treatments as excommunicating, being set asided and shunned by family, friends, work environment, and the society.

Besides the acceptance and assessment of society, family has a major role. Parents who have already known that their child is a homosexual often find it devastated and they feel guilty. Parents will usually also stop financial aid, drive out a child from home, or excommunicate their child (Walker, 1996 ; Nevid, 1995). Parents who cannot accept and understand the situation faced by their homosexual child often punish their child without trying to understand it from the child's side.

However, the rejection shown and the treatment given by the society and family can give the bad influence to the psychological's side of the homosexuals. The homosexuals will feel underpressure and stress. Lazarus once mentioned that stress is viewed as a relationship ('transaction') between individuals and their environment (Lazarus, 1986: 63). Lazarus points out the facts that stress is able to come from both the environment which is outside of human's body and the individuals itself which includes human's feeling, mind, and the condition of the body.

In understanding that everyone has their own personal side that cannot be equated, society must be able to treat other people wisely to avoid the worst result that might happen.

3. Research Methods

This essay uses two methods in collecting and analyzing the data and information to support the topic. Those are research method and approach method.

In collecting and analyzing data of the object of the research, this essay uses LibraryResearch. Data and theories are collected from any library materials correlated with the subject analyzed. The sources of all the data are books, films, reviews, and other supporting references.

In this essay, the discussion is divided into the analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Intrinsic aspect is everything that includes in the narrative of the film. In this essay, they are character, setting, and conflict. Extrinsic aspect is more about the motivation and the condition of the characters of the film.

In order to analyze the motive of the two main characters, Christian and Aaron, the writer uses sociological approach or also known as sociological criticism to know what pressure faced by Aaron and Christian as homosexuals, and what reason that finally encourage Aaron to pass over the environment that has excommunicated him and to escape from the treatment facility to find Christian. Kennedy and Gioia stated: "Sociological criticism also analyzes the social content of literary works—what cultural, economic or political values a particular text implicitly or explicitly promotes" (2002: 2194). Sociological

criticism or sociological approach deals with social questions or problems, especially focusing on cultural and environmental factors rather than on psychological or personal characteristics.

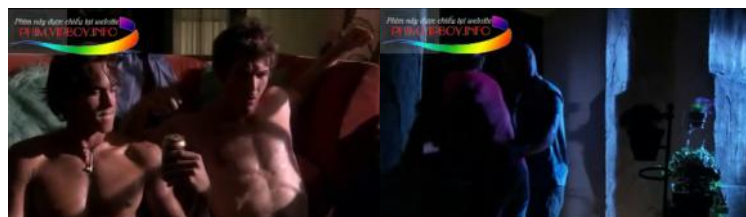
In this essay, the sociological approach is applied to analyze the social condition which either supports or brings down the two main characters in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*.

4. The Pressures of Being Homosexuals as Represented in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*

4.1. Narrative Aspect Analysis

Christian, Aaron and their homosexuality are the center of this essay. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the whole story through the characters, setting, and conflict analysis. The analysis of cinematic aspects, camera distance and camera angle, also helps to understand the film better.

Christian and Aaron are two main characters in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*. They actually have very different personalities. Christian, who works as a waiter in a restaurant, is a gay party boy. As shown in Picture 4.1.1. which use medium shot camera distance in eye level camera angle, Christian spends two nights with two different guys, and for him it is just a way to get some pleasure.



Picture 4.1.1. 00 : 02 : 29 00 : 10 : 55

On the other hand, Aaron is a young Mormon from Pocatello, Idaho, who is sent to Los Angeles with three other missionaries to spread the Mormon faith. He is a kind and innocent boy. Picture 4.1.2. shows when Aaron already has just arrived in Los Angeles and spent just a few days of being away from home. He has already gotten home-sick.



Picture 4.1.2. 00 : 00 : 29 00 : 16 : 48

The first picture uses medium shot camera distance in eye level camera angle while the second picture is just a photograph which is taken in high angle.

Other characters are Julie, Ryder, Lila, and Aaron's parents. Julie is Christian's room mate who helps Christian and Aaron to be united by her new song. Ryder is Aaron's fellow missionary who acts unfriendly to Christian but helps him to find Aaron just before Aaron goes back to Idaho at last. Lila is the owner of the restaurant where Christian works and a friend of Aaron. Aaron's father is a leader of the church elders that excommunicate Aaron. Aaron's mother is the one who scolds and slaps Aaron for being a homosexual. Each character in this film has his/her own part in either supporting or making Aaron and Christian feel underpressure.

The setting is divided into three parts: setting of time, place, and social setting. First, it is clearly seen that the setting of time is in the recent years. Most

of the actions in the film take place in Los Angeles. However, some scenes are also taken in other places. As can be seen in Picture 4.1.3., Christian confesses his love to Aaron at the airport terminal in Salt Lake City. Both pictures use medium long shot camera distance in eye level position to enrich the beautiful side of these two scenes.

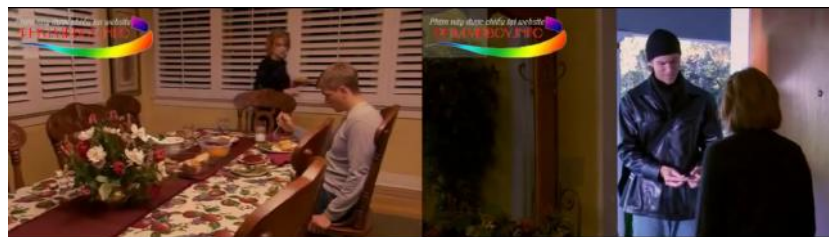


Picture 4.1.3.

00 : 55 : 44

00 : 58 : 15

In Picture 4.1.4. which use medium long shot in eye level shot angle, the scenes are taken in Idaho, Aaron's hometown. Beside Aaron and his family, Christian has also a scene taken in Idaho. It is when he comes up to Aaron's house trying to find his Aaron and gives back Aaron's watch to Aaron's mother.



Picture 4.1.4.

01 : 17 : 46

01 : 30 : 38

Although not clearly stated, the story takes place within a few months time. The social setting is in recent days in Los Angeles where the free life style has been viewed as ordinary and the religious things are often considered as weird and ridiculous.

Conflict in this film begins to occur when Aaron and Christian are caught kissing in the apartment by the other missionaries as can be seen in Picture 4.1.5.. The first picture uses middle close up camera distance while the second picture uses two types of camera distance: medium shot for Christian and Aaron's kissing and long shot for the missionaries caught Christian and Aaron kissing. Both pictures use eye level camera angle.



Picture 4.1.5. 00 : 50 : 33 00 : 50 : 43

Aaron, who is shocked and affraid, is sent back to his hometown, Idaho. While Aaron gets so much pressure from his parents and his church, Christian gets stressed out in trying to find Aaron. Climax of the conflict occurs in Aaron's psychological condition. The pressure he gets from his parents force him to attempt suicide right after his mother slaps him as can be seen in Picture 4.1.6.. The first picture uses middle close up camera distance of Aaron's back in high angle. The second picture uses medium shot camera distance in eye level camera angle.



Picture 4.1.6. 01 : 15 : 06 01 : 20 : 47

The climax of the conflict starts to decrease when Aaron discovers the video on television in the treatment facility that finally prompts him to return to Los Angeles in search of Christian. Through a long journey without finding Christian, Aaron makes his way to Lila's Restaurant where he finally finds Christian. Christian and Aaron reconcile and later celebrate Thanksgiving with Christian's co-workers. Christian and Aaron finally find their way back to be together. Lila, the owner of restaurant, tells everyone that, no matter what, they will always have "a place at my table, and a place in my heart".

4.2. Social Pressure Experienced by Christian and Aaron as Homosexuals

Homosexuality has been an ordinary thing in Los Angeles where most people live their lives freely without bothering one another. Los Angeles is even known as one of the gay villages in North America where there are more than fourteen gay bars. In the *Latter Days* movie, Christian has no problem due to his being a homosexual for he lives in Los Angeles with many friends who understand and do not blame him for being a homosexual. Christian can still live his life as other normal people. He can still work as a waiter, do exercise, and have party and end-up with different man every night.

Different from Christian, Aaron grows up in a religious family in Idaho. Aaron is straight at first. He is a lovely son of his parents and a good friend for his missionary fellows in Los Angeles. However, Aaron falls in love with Christian as the time goes by, and it causes a great difference in Aaron's life. He is sent back to Idaho after his missionary fellows not only blame him, but also report him for

being homosexual. It can be seen from Dialogue 4.2.1. when Aaron is caught kissing with Christian.

Dialogue 4.2.1.

Christian : *Well look, nothing happens here.*

Ryder : *We walked in here and you two were macking like schoolgirls and you're saying nothing happened?*

Christian : *Well, maybe you can try and reach down in your little bible geek soul and be cool for two seconds?*

Ryder : *I don't think you get to be making requests here, gayboy.*

(*Latter Days*, 00 : 50 : 45 – 00 : 51 : 01)

After that incident, Aaron is excommunicated by his church and rejected by his parents. All of those things cause Aaron to live in despair. Being under pressure makes Aaron try to end his life, and he is later sent to a treatment facility. The pressure he gets from his nearest friends can also be seen from Picture 4.1.7..



Picture 4.1.7.

00 : 50 : 49

00: 51: 26

While Aaron is still under pressure from his parents and society, Christian is also dying to find Aaron, his love. However, Christian is still able to live his life as usual for he has many friends who still love and support him. Even in the middle of his stress about Aaron, Christian can still enjoy his life with his friends as can be seen in Picture 4.1.8.. Both pictures use medium shot size in eye level position.



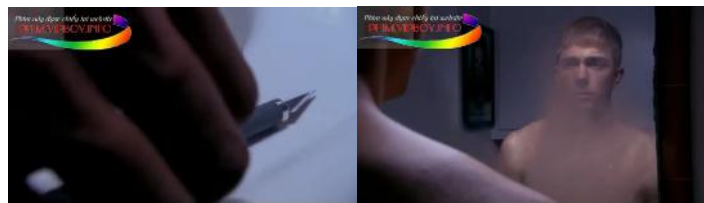
Picture 4.1.8.

01 : 21 : 39

01 : 22 : 25

The reaction of Aaron in accepting the social pressure shows that the environment really has power to affect human's; mind, feeling, and behaviour. Aaron's psychological condition is deeply affected. Aaron and Christian show that the ability of someone in facing stress is different. Christian can handle his stress and do things he is used to doing while Aaron is down in his stress and not able to do his daily life as usual.

The society has a great influence of someone's personality. The bad treatments and judgement Aaron gets from his family and friends cause him to live in sorrow and decide to commit suicide as can be seen in Picture 4.1.9.. Both pictures are taken in big close up camera distance and eye level camera angle.



Picture 4.1.9.

01 : 22 : 22

01 : 22 : 24

Aaron feels that nobody loves him and accepts him for being a homosexual. If only his family and friends treated him well and did not give him much pressure of his homosexuality, Aaron would be able to live his life as he used to do.

However, Aaron has done something good for his life by escaping from the treatment facility and trying to find Christian. At the end, Aaron finds Christian as shown in Picture 4.1.10.. The first picture uses long shot camera distance in eye level position, and the second picture uses medium long shot camera distance in high angle position.



Picture 4.1.10. 01 : 41 : 32

01 : 42 : 14

They both are so happy to meet each other. Aaron finally makes a great decision that changes his life by living with Christian and staying with people who accept and still care about him even though he is homosexual. Living with people who can treat him well gives back Aaron's spirit to live his life. Eventually Aaron and Christian can find happiness of being together even though they have what some people consider as sexual disorientation.

5. CONCLUSION

There are so many things to learn in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*, but the most important lesson can be seen in the different society of Aaron and Christian which cause the different influence to them. When someone is a gay or homosexual, it does not mean that society has a right to blame that he does something wrong and deserves much pressure. As a part of society, people must treat other people well even when they have a different way of life.

In this modern era, many people have already been familiar with homosexuality. However, there are still many others who consider homosexuality as a taboo thing. That different point of view should not make people judge and treat someone badly because people need to understand that the treatment given to someone can cause a great influence in his life. That is why people as a part of

society must be able to see a difference objectively. As represented in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*, people who accept and love the two main characters, even though they are homosexuals, are able to make them comfortable and feel like a family when their true family just reject them for being homosexuals.

In conclusion, everyone has a right to live his life. Everybody has different abilities in facing social pressure. Therefore, society must be able to understand different orientation including the different sexual orientation of someone in order to let other people as part of society to enjoy their lives as normal people.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2013). *Sexual orientation, Homosexuality and Bisexuality*. USA.
- Cox, C Jay. *Latter Days* (film). (2004). USA: Funny Boy Films, Davis Entertainment Filmworks.
- Greene, B.& Croom, G. (2000). *Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Issues: Vol. 5*. Education, research, and practice in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered psychology: A resource manual. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guerin, Wilfred L.et.al. (1992). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hooker, Evelyn. (1957). *The Adjustment of The Male Overt Homosexual*. Journal of Projective Techniques. New York: Association Press.
- Kennedy, X. J. and Dana Gioia. (2002). *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. 8th Edition. New York: Longman.
- Krohne, H W. (2002). *Stress and Coping Theories*. 2 December 2014. <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/schuez/folien/Krohne_Stress.pdf>.
- Lazarus, R S. (1966). *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lazarus, R S. (1991). *Emotion and Adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- McDougal, Littell. (2001). *The Language of Literature*. USA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Mckenzie, Charles A.L. (2003). *The 5 Technical Areas for Action-Adventure Films*.
- Meyer, Michael. (1990). *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. Boston: Bedford Martin's Press.
- Morner, Kathleen and Ralph Rausch. (1991). *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Term*. USA: NTC Publishing Group.
- Nevid, Jeffrey S. (1995). *Human Sexuality in a World of Diversity*. Boston: Ally and Bacon.
- Nurgiyantoro, Burhan. (2009). *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*. Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press.
- Perrine, Laurence. (1988). *Story and Structure*. USA: Thomson Learning.
- Pratista, Himawan. (2008). *Memahami Film*. Yogyakarta: Homerian Pustaka.
- Potter, James L. (1967). *Element of Literature*. USA: The Odyssey Press, Inc
- Semi, Attar. (1993). *Metode Penelitian Sastra*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Spencer, D. A. (1973). *The Focal Dictionary of Photographic Technologies*. New York: NY Focal Press.
- Swanson, Richard A. (2003). *Theory Building in Applied Disciplines*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 11 December 2014. <<http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=618409>>
- Walker, R. (1996). *Sex and Relationship : The Complete Family Guide*. London : De Agustini Editions.
- Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. (1977). *Theory of Literature*. USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.